

MACKWORTH-PRAED, C.W. & GRANT, C.H.B. 1957. *Birds of Eastern and North Eastern Africa* Volume I. London & New York: Longman.

URBAN, E.K & BROWN, L.H. 1971. *A Checklist of the Birds of Ethiopia*. Addis Ababa: Haile Sellassie I University Press.

N. J. Redman, Holly Bank, Grindleton, Clitheroe, Lancashire BB7 40T, England and C-G. Cederlund, Syaregatan 23, 432 75 Träslövsläge, Sweden

Scopus 14: 17-19, May 1990

Received 16 October 1989

Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax* following a foraging pack of Hunting Dogs *Lycaon pictus*

Late on an overcast afternoon in early August 1989, I was following a foraging pack of hunting dogs *Lycaon pictus* in the north of the Maasai Mara Game Reserve, Kenya. The light was failing and, despite dashing here and there and making a lot of noise, the dogs did not seem to be fully committed to the chase, making only brief, half-hearted sorties after the large number of potential prey animals in the area.

Still, I decided to follow the pack for a little longer to see if a kill would be made, and it was at around 18:00 hrs, when dusk was already falling, that a subadult Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax* suddenly swooped low over the dogs and perched in a small bare tree directly above them. Then, as the pack charged off on another erratic, gambolling pursuit, the eagle waited a few moments, pursued them, flew low over them again, and then alighted on another perch, nearby. Even though the dogs had yet to make a kill, the eagle was still following the dogs in this manner at 19:00 hrs when I left the scene. Darkness had fallen by this time, and headlights were essential for driving.

There were two possible explanations to account for the eagle's presence with the dogs. First, large aerial scavengers are thought to locate kills by watching the movements of large mammalian predators, and the Tawny Eagle may have been following the dogs' (and other predators') progress from high above, when the failing light conditions forced it to fly low over them, in order to keep them in view. Alternatively, and more likely in view of Brown *et al.*'s (1982) note that Tawny Eagles are usually roosting from around two hours before sunset, the roosting bird may have opportunistically set off in pursuit of the running pack, sensing the possibility of food, after the erratic course of their foraging had brought them close to its roosting tree.

In either case, the eagle seems to have the ability to associate the hunting pack with food, to anticipate the provision of food items produced by the pack's hunting and devouring. This anticipation seems distinct from many scavengers' rapid attraction to already existing food sources, e.g. carcasses.

This close, active, determined pursuit of large, foraging predators does not appear to be a common phenomenon. I have never witnessed it during several years of safari work; and neither has John Fanshawe (pers.comm.), who has watched over 200 pursuits by Hunting Dogs in the Serengeti and in the Maasai Mara. Tawny Eagles are, however, known to be attracted by the gunshots of parties of bird-shooters both in Africa and India, and to follow the hunters until they are able to fly in, often very boldly, to steal flushed,

wounded or killed birds (Brown & Amadon 1968, Steyn 1982). Dean & MacDonald (1981) record similar behaviour in African Hawk Eagles *Hieraetus spilogaster*, Bateleurs *Terathopius ecaudatus*, Eurasian Marsh Harriers *Circus aeruginosus* and Pallid Harriers *C. macrourus*.

References

- BROWN, L.H. & AMADON, D. 1968. *Eagles, hawks and falcons of the World*. Feltham: Country Life Books.
- BROWN, L.H., URBAN, E.K. & NEWMAN, K. 1982. *The birds of Africa*. London: Academic Press.
- DEAN, W.R.J. & MACDONALD, I.A.W. 1981. A review of African birds feeding in association with mammals. *Ostrich* 52: 135–155.
- STEYN, P. 1982. *The birds of prey of southern Africa*. Beckenham: Croom Helm.

Dr Adrian D. Lewis, 36 Lilymead Avenue, Knowle, Bristol B54 2BX, England

Scopus 14: 19–20, May 1990

Received 26 September 1989

A threat display of the Water Thicknee *Burhinus vermiculatus*

A seasonally flowing *lugga* to the south of Buffalo Springs Lodge in northern Kenya contains a pair of Water Thicknees *Burhinus vermiculatus* that are often readily visible by day, roosting on a rather exposed ledge beneath an overhanging rock face and above a small pool. One morning, when these thicknees were roosting in their usual motionless state, a Monitor Lizard *Varanus* sp. suddenly appeared over the lip of the ledge and walked right up to them.

This formidable carnivore was about a metre long and it seemed that the birds must be attacked, but they immediately turned to face it, spreading their wings fully and holding them up and away from the body, so that their full ventral surfaces faced the lizards. The carpal joints of the wings were raised to around the level of the birds' eyes, and the wing tips were higher still. This display greatly increased the bird's apparent size, while the white underwing coverts became suddenly very prominent as glaring white areas which, together with the birds' bills, were kept facing down at the lizard. The birds continually uttered sharp, high calls.

This confrontation lasted for 30 seconds or so, after which the lizard turned and walked along the ledge past the thicknees, and disappeared into the surrounding bushes. As the lizard passed them, the thicknees turned so as to keep the full ventral area of their wings directed at it. After it had disappeared, they resumed their motionless roosting.

There does not appear to be any information on Water Thicknee displays in the literature (Urban *et al.* 1986). For the closely related Eurasian Stone Curlew *B. oed-icnemus*, however, Cramp & Simmons (1983) quote an instance in which an individual stood its ground and raised and fanned its wings on being threatened by a Stoat *Mustela erminea*. This appears to be similar to the Water Thicknees' stance, whereas the threat posture described for the more distantly related Spotted Thicknee *B. capensis* has the